

PREFACE

One of our more enjoyable meals is homemade pizza—especially in the summer or early fall, when we can use our own tomatoes and onions. We make two large pizzas on baking sheets, eat half of one that first night, then freeze the rest for about three or four more meals. Our pizzas begin with Linda's homemade herbal crust, then sausage or ham, pineapple, onions, tomatoes, black olives, and topped off with slabs of provolone and mounds of mozzarella cheese. Linda insists on piling the cheese out to the very edge, which, later, presents a problem—especially if it is *my* night to wash the dishes.

You see, any of that delicious dough and cheese that makes contact with the edge of the pans locks on and hardens like concrete after its time in the oven. You can soak it, you can scrape it, get down on your hands and knees and plead for help from above, but it always requires arduous time and labor to clean the edges of those two pans. And as one is breaking off fingernails and cursing the kitchen gods (while the one drying that night *thanks* those same gods that it is not her night to wash) something that was earlier delicious and pleasing to the eye turns into an ugly, soggy and hated collection of worthless scraps good only for the garbage.

Look at v13 in our text, where Paul writes that he and the apostles have become “the scum of the world, the dregs of all things”—or as the KJVs have it, “the offscouring of all things.” Here Paul is using two Greek words used nowhere else in Scripture to say that they—the apostles—are no better than that crud scraped off the edges of our pizza pans, good only for the garbage.

For some time now in this letter, Paul has been contrasting the arrogant and presumptuous behavior of the Corinthians to the more lowly and servant-minded behavior of himself and his fellow apostles. In this he has employed irony, sarcasm and hyperbole in an effort to convict them of their errant attitude.

Although we spent two previous sessions on vv8-10, it is important that we re-read that passage so that we understand the contrast Paul is setting up here.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-10.

Now, in v11, Paul switches to “straight talk” (Fee). He abandons irony, sarcasm and exaggeration. If the next three verses were describing anyone else—especially someone today—it would most assuredly be hyperbole. But for Paul and his companions this represents real-life. He is dead serious.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:11-13.

To this present hour...

This list of experiences is held together by the two bookends that begin and end the passage. The first bookend is “To this present hour,” and the second is, at the end of v13, “even until now.” (The NIV and ESV place it in the middle of v13 with “Up to this moment” and “and are still,” respectively.) Both of these end-caps reveal two truths: that this treatment has been going on for some time (it is nothing new) and it continues still—all of which, by the way, puts the lie to the spurious and deceitful, so-called “health and wealth gospel” that we discussed in our previous session.

we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed

Perhaps our best commentary on this passage is Paul’s second known letter to the church, where he expands somewhat on his mere listing of items here. In Chapter Six of 2 Corinthians he offers a similar but expanded list. But in Chapter Eleven of that letter he is more descriptive, and makes it clear—especially when we combine these passages with the record in The Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s other letters—that this is not mere hyperbole for the sake of dramatizing his remarks, but is backed up by very real life experience.

Sidebar: I’m not sure of the significance, if there is any, but I note that in the first letter Paul writes in the present tense (“we are”) and includes the other apostles, whereas in the second letter he writes in the past tense (“I was,” “I have”) and speaks only for himself.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:27.

Do we have further evidence of Paul’s being hungry and thirsty?

Read Philippians 4:12.

It is clear from this passage in Philippians that being deprived of sustenance was not just a one-time occurrence for Paul and his men. He “learned” (implied, over time, through practice) of “going hungry.” He also says that they are “poorly clothed”; interesting word, *gymniteuomen* (goom-nay-too-men):

- This verb, which means to be naked, can mean literally that, as we would understand nakedness today. In the spelling of the word we see right off the word “gym,” as in gymnastics or gymnasium. Greek athletes would compete literally naked, hence the logical etymology from the word meaning to do gymnastics to meaning being naked.

- But it can also mean being poorly or improperly attired. Fishermen (and other laborers) would work with just one layer of clothing on for efficiency, but that might not be appropriate while in the public eye. So when Jesus called out to the disciples from the shoreline, and Peter recognized the Lord, before he jumped into the water to go to Him, he put on his outer cloak.

So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped [gymnos, naked] for work), and threw himself into the sea. (John 21:7b)

The latter definition of the word fits our current passage—hence the NASB, “poorly clothed.” The KJVs are *literally* true, but do not fit the context. The ancient Seneca referred to this as being “wretchedly clad.”

[we] are roughly treated,

roughly treated^{nasb}, **brutally treated**^{niv}, **buffeted**^{kjv,esv}, **beaten**^{nkjv} = *kolaphizo* = to strike with the fist.

Paul and Silas certainly experienced this in Philippi.

Read Acts 16:22-24.

In his second letter to the Corinthians he adds more details about his beatings—and we begin to see how the KJV and ESV’s “buffeted” doesn’t quite capture the fullness of what Paul experienced.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-25.

and are homeless;

There is not a word in Scripture about Paul having a home, a domestic dwelling. Peter’s home is mentioned (in Capernaum, where Jesus healed his mother-in-law), but nothing for Paul. His biography in Scripture paints a picture of someone constantly moving from one city to the next, one region to the next, always (as Blanche DuBois in *Streetcar* was known to say) having to rely on the kindness of strangers.

v12

and we toil, working with our own hands;

I know from experience that there are those who have the attitude and lifestyle, “I am in ministry, so take care of me.” They *expect* to be supported; they claim it as a right. But the apostle Paul—even though committed to a ministry so important, so foundational to the Christian faith for the entire world—was unapologetically “bi-vocational.” There were times—not always, but often—when he worked on the side so as to help pay his own way.

Later in this letter (Chapter Nine) Paul will defend his right to be supported by others, citing (in v9) among other arguments the line from the Law, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” [Please turn to Acts 20.](#)

Elsewhere, however, he purposely found work to pay his own way. Paul had a practical trade: tent-making, which afforded him an introduction to Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, and they gave him a place to stay. Later, while in Miletus, Paul sent for the elders and explained to them, beginning in v33,

Read Acts 20:33-35.

We can draw from this that Paul’s ultimate purpose was to illustrate whatever any group of believers required to feed their faith. If they needed a lesson in giving, he wanted them to give for his support; if that would become a stumbling block to their faith, as it was in Thessalonica, he would work to pay his own way.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

What we learn from this is a demonstration of a true servant’s heart and behavior. Paul lived—not just spoke, but *lived*—for the benefit of those to whom he ministered.

So far in just the first half of these three verses we have already been given a substantive picture of a true servant, one who

- suffered hunger and thirst,
- went without proper or sufficient clothing,
- was roughly and sometimes brutally tortured for the name of Christ,
- had no personal home-base to which to retreat, and
- did manual labor to earn his keep even while serving as an evangelist.

Jesus said that He came not to be served, but to serve, and even to give His very life for others (Mark 10:45). Paul, as well as the other apostles, conducted their respective ministries as living examples of Christ’s words and His life on earth. In almost all respects, Paul’s sacrifices mirrored those of His Lord. What is easy to forget is that even though Christ is now glorified, He *remains* the servant, always thinking of others before Himself. What is His “work” right this minute?

- He **intercedes**: “...Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” (Romans 8:34b)
- He is our **Advocate**: “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1b)